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The Inside Story

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CASTRO'S RANSOM DEMAND

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There's more than meets the eye in the latest bartering with Fidel Castro over his Bay of Pigs prisoners.

On the surface, it was billed as a private, non-Government negotiation. But the Kennedy Administration was deeply involved from the beginning.

And Castro's Communists set a record high on the price per man in auctioning human beings.

It was in May, 1961—barely a month after the collapse of an attempted invasion of Cuba—that the first effort was made to ransom the men taken prisoner by Castro's forces.

At that time, the price set by Castro was 3 million dollars. The prisoners totaled about 1,200. The deal was to be farm tractors in exchange for captives.

In the dickering that followed, Castro jacked his price way up—to 28 million dollars. He insisted on holding back some of his prisoners. He decided he wanted bulldozers and other heavy equipment rather than ordinary farm tractors.

Faced with Castro's rising demands, a private U.S. fund-raising committee gave up and disbanded.

All through those negotiations, the U. S. Government stood aside because it could not accept Castro's insistence that the ransom deal would be an "indemnity" by the U.S. in part payment for damage done to Cuba in the April 17 invasion that failed.

The price: up again. In 1961, the deal collapsed. But in recent days a new effort began to pay a ransom to Castro.

This time, Castro's price had soared to 62 million dollars. Payment, at least in part, was to be in food and medicine. The number of prisoners to be ransomed was reduced to 1,113. Some of the original 1,200 had died. Sixty, ill and wounded, already had been ransomed by a Cuban refugee organization in the U.S. on its promise to pay Castro nearly 3 million dollars in cash—a sum still not paid.

In the latest dealings with Castro, the U.S. Government officially stood aside, as it did in the original bargaining.

But, from the beginning, there were widespread reports in Washington that the U.S. was deeply involved.

• At least 13 million dollars of Government funds, it was said, was involved in the haggling with Castro.

• Surplus U.S. food, in Government hands, was expected by many to find its way to Castro as part of the ransom.

• Medicines also were involved. These could be paid for from private contributions, but it was doubtful if such contributions could get up to the millions of dollars Castro was after.

Where could such money be found?

There was speculation—unconfirmed—that money in the very large "contingency funds" available to the President might enter into the bargaining.

Also, the Central Intelligence Agency, which financed the ill-fated Bay of Pigs invasion a year ago last April, has large amounts of cash at its disposal for which no public accounting is ever made.

A new involvement. Whether the final settlement with Castro was to be financed by private funds, Government funds, or some of both, the fact remained that the Cuban Red had U.S. officials entwined in something that, historically, has been repugnant to this nation—ransom and blackmail demands by another nation, with human beings at stake.

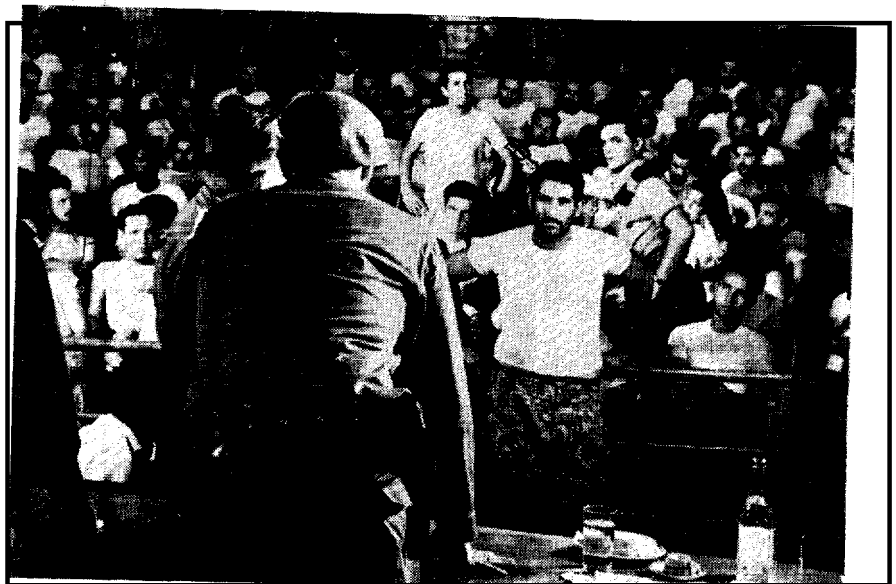
The U.S., through most of its history, has bluntly rebuffed such demands.

In 1797, before the nation was 10 years old, French officials demanded a bribe of \$240,000 from the U.S. Charles

(continued on page 42)

Vigil at Miami. Families of Cuban prisoners waited for news through many anxious hours.

—UPI



—PLX

Castro and prisoners in Havana after the Bay of Pigs invasion. The dictator's ransom demands for 1,113 captives were pushed higher and higher.

CASTRO'S RANSOM DEMAND

[Continued from page 41]

C. Pinckney, then U. S. envoy to France, is known to history for his now-famous remark: "Millions for defense, but not one cent for tribute."

Again, in 1904, a Moroccan tribal chief named Raisuli seized a naturalized U. S. citizen, Ion Perdicaris, and held him for ransom. President Theodore Roosevelt moved part of the U. S. Navy into the area and sent this ultimatum:

"Perdicaris alive or Raisuli dead."

As a result, Perdicaris was released.

A clue for Castro. It was not until the U. S. found itself dealing with Communist governments in Europe after World War II that even the consideration of ransom payments took on official status.

Ransoms were paid by the Government. The first payment went to Communist Hungary in 1951. Robert A. Vogeler, an American businessman, had been jailed in Budapest on charges of spying. After months of negotiation, the U. S. won his freedom. The price: The U. S. gave the Communists Hungarian assets it had seized during World War II.

In that same year, Soviet airmen forced down a U. S. military plane in Hungary.

To free the four U. S. airmen who had been aboard the plane, the U. S. paid the Hungarian Communists \$123,605—about \$31,000 per man.

It was Castro, however, who perfected the ransom-by-government technique.

Last year Castro, in his original attempt to sell captives, set his initial asking price far lower than the amounts collected from the U. S. by European Communists. But by this year his price had gone far higher than anything paid before.

From \$2,500 per prisoner, Castro raised his ransom to \$23,000, then to \$56,000.

In the wings—What was the role in all this of the U. S. Government, which does not recognize Castro, refuses to do business with him and is currently trying to get U. S. allies to withdraw their vessels from handling cargoes between Cuba and the Communist countries which have become Castro's principal means of support?

Officially, there was silence. But it is



—UPI

IN 1951, Robert A. Vogeler was reunited with his family after official U. S. negotiations with a Red government—Hungary—for release of an American.



—UPI

LATER that year, U. S. bargaining won release of four American airmen who had been aboard a plane forced down in Hungary. Price per man—about \$31,000.



—Plx

SINCE MAY, 1961, attempts have been made by various groups, without official U. S. backing, to secure release of Cubans captured at the Bay of Pigs.

known that the Department of State was in close touch with the negotiations from the beginning.

The man who handled the negotiations with Castro in Cuba was James B. Donovan, a New York lawyer and the Democratic candidate for U. S. Senator in that State.

Officially, Mr. Donovan was representing an organization of Cuban refugees in this country. But over the past few months he conferred several times with Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy. On at least one occasion, a State Department representative sat in.

In addition to his contacts with Mr. Donovan, the Attorney General has kept in touch with Cuban refugee leaders.

Mr. Donovan's role in the negotiations with Castro tended to reinforce reports that the Government's part in the affair went beyond expressions of sympathy. It was recalled that the same New York lawyer acted on behalf of the Central Intelligence Agency earlier this year in arranging the release of U-2 pilot Francis Gary Powers from Russia.

A ransom of a sort was involved in that deal. Mr. Powers got his freedom by being exchanged for Col. Rudolf Abel, a top Soviet spy who had been convicted and imprisoned in the U. S.

When Mr. Donovan turned his attention to Castro, he found himself dealing with a hard bargainer. Castro kept delaying the ransom deal from day to day. On October 11 Mr. Donovan left Havana. By that time Castro still had not agreed to the Donovan offer.

Why? Various theories are advanced to explain Castro's action.

One is that Castro feared what might happen once the refugees were free.

This theory is that he wanted to hold the men as hostages who could be sacrificed, as insurance against another invasion attempt.

Another theory holds that Cuba's Communist leader would prefer to dole out his captives a few at a time, thus extending the earning power of his ransom demand and making it possible for him to adjust the prices as he saw fit.

Whatever the outcome of the negotiations, this is clear:

Castro, as a dealer in human beings, has brought his Government's ransom price up to the highest point in history. Step by step, he advanced the bargaining from 3 million to 62 million dollars in about a year and a half.